



Renters expect a better kitchen these days especially in higher income areas

PULLING STRINGS IN THE KITCHEN

Renovating a kitchen can be time consuming and costly. Add value to your home by looking around.

By **Louise Richardson**

WHILE IT SEEMS from straw polling that most landlords and property investors allow between \$6000 and \$8000 on average for a kitchen replacement, refit or makeover, tales are emerging of people who've done it for much less - often using very fresh, imaginative and innovative approaches.

If money is short or you feel a complete renovation isn't worthwhile in terms of adding value now, consider a basic makeover using paint. It can be remarkably effective and will buy you time to save for a better kitchen later.

Paints are available for every kind of material these days and experts at paint outlets can advise which will work best on a particular surface. One that's especially useful is Resenes' Smooth Surface Sealer which enables you to paint such smooth products as melamine.

New drawer handles, new splashbacks, flooring, tapware and other small but imaginative changes can also enhance the sense that this really is a 'new' kitchen.

PROPORTION

Sue Anderton, a property investor from Dunedin, generally tries to keep the work she gets done to a certain proportion of the house's value. Perhaps because of the plethora of food based TV shows she's finding renters are expecting more in terms of quality when it comes to kitchens

and a good one can definitely influence rental income.

"I think you have to consider the kind of tenants you're hoping to attract to a particular property," Anderton says. "I had some who used an axe to chop meat on the bench. They forfeited their bond, sure, but it cost me much more than that to have it repaired!"

Rather than buy flat-pack kitchens Anderton generally has hers made by local joiners.

"We have some very good ones here in Dunedin and I like to support them."

One of her friends acquired unused orders from a joinery company and had them cut to fit the kitchen space in her rental property. With a second-hand hob and stove the project came in under \$2000.

"It didn't have many drawers through!" Anderton says.

RENOVATED

Anne Dillon, of Christchurch, is feeling particularly proud of herself having completely renovated for minimal outlay the kitchen in a rental property she owns in Invercargill.

"The tenant had absolutely trashed it," she said. "We went to one of the big hardware stores but theirs were going to cost about \$5000 for the joinery alone and in terms of Invercargill's property market that just wasn't going to work for us."

Anne Dillon and her husband, Rex, put on their thinking caps and managed to buy a perfect kitchen from a red zoned house in Christchurch for \$1000 and a new benchtop – plus sink and taps came in at \$1200. Freight to Invercargill was \$450, a second hand cooker was sourced locally for \$400 and after installation and plumbing costs were met, Anne Dillon still had change from \$5000.

“And that feels about right,” Dillon says.

In Auckland the costs can be somewhat higher but investor Paul Magill simply works out what’s appropriate for the neighbourhood.

“Putting an expensive kitchen in one of my South Auckland properties generally won’t bring in more rental revenue so I tend to cap these ones at around \$6000 and use flat-pack ones from hardware stores.

“In my North Shore kitchens I spend considerably more because it really does affect the type of tenant you attract and if the kitchen’s nice they will really look after it.

MAKER

Magill has used the same kitchen maker on the North Shore for many years.

“When you find someone good I always think you should stick with them!”

Mark Trafford, from Maintain to Profit, has been in the building business for 20 years and managed one of the country’s biggest kitchen companies for three years.

He’s an avid property investor so he knows the importance of getting the right balance when budgeting for a new kitchen.

“Most people only allow for about half of the eventual cost,” Trafford says.

“They forget that the appliances are an additional and significant expense because, in their minds, they’re just thinking joinery and a benchtop!”

The company constructs around 100 kitchens each year for investors and while some are very basic, others are more well-appointed.

“As a rule we suggest keeping things simple with laminate bench tops and melamine-coated joinery,” Trafford says.

“White or neutral colours tend to be best in

KITCHEN RENOVATION CHECKLIST

- 1** Planning is paramount. Involve as many experts as you can.
- 2** Design is important. Make sure you are using the space available to its best advantage
- 3** Budget can be a minefield. Don't underestimate how much money you need to spend but beware of over-capitalisation too!
- 4** Tradespeople are essential for a polished end product. DIY is fine but engage professionals for the parts you aren't sure about.
- 5** Don't forget the small stuff. Making sure you have an adequate number of power points, for example.
- 6** Try to think 'green' – choosing energy efficient appliances and use sustainable materials (such as bamboo) for flooring.
- 7** Consider your tenants' needs. While most people enjoy cooking these days, double ovens and ice-makers are generally considered to be luxuries.
- 8** Get all your ducks in a row. Tenants don't like being inconvenienced so make sure you have all the materials handy and tradespeople confirmed before work commences.



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most situations because they are versatile and don't date.”

He points out that while store-bought flat-pack kitchens have their place, they can also result in a lot more work for the landlord in terms of installation.

TIME-FRAME

Since most property investors are busy people, he suggests looking for fixed-price, fixed time-frame arrangements.

“Then you can tell your tenant that they'll be without a kitchen for three or four days and that's exactly what happens.”

Laser Group's national marketing manager Sarah Bowie is big on forward planning.

“Whether you're installing a DIY kitchen or getting contractors in, there are many things that need to be considered,” Bowie says.

“These days kitchens need to perform so many functions it's really important to get expert advice – even for a rental.

“There are USB chargers, phone jacks and lots more technology to take into account.”

Bowie suggests involving an electrician in the lighting design because they have the skills and experience to know what will work best.

She also suggests getting a plumber in to help work out where dishwashers and sinks should go. “Again, they know about these things and this way it's possible to avoid costly mistakes.” ■



Mark Trafford suggests neutral colour schemes work best



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